

## **TESTIMONY OF**

**Hon. LUIS G. FORTUÑO**  
**Governor of Puerto Rico**

## **BEFORE**

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Management**

**June 21, 2012**  
**Washington, D.C.**

### **Welcome**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I appear before you today to address the building national security threat posed by transnational drug trafficking organizations infiltrating our country and endangering the safety of over 4 million U.S. citizens living along the U.S. Caribbean Border.

I would like to thank Chairman McCaul for his leadership in calling this hearing and bringing attention to this growing security challenge that has been overlooked in Washington for too long. Because as you well understand, Mr. Chairman, this is not just about the safety and security of the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, but also intricately linked to the safety of U.S. citizens throughout the mainland.

### **Current Situation**

Today, Puerto Rico is serving as the first line of defense in the Caribbean to prevent drugs and violence from reaching the U.S. mainland. Drug trafficking cartels operating from Colombia and through transit countries like Venezuela and the Dominican Republic are sparking a battle for drug turf in Puerto Rico and unleashing a brutal wave of violence in their wake.

Let me paint a picture of what we are facing. Last year, at a mall just outside of San Juan, a violent conflict between two drug dealers over the control of nearby drug retail points resulted in a bloody shooting that left one of the dealers dead and several innocent bystanders wounded.

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon, in the middle of the food court crowded with dozens of adults and children, 21-year-old Luis Daniel Valdez Meléndez opened fire, shooting rival Emmanuel "Manny" Zapata Cazo, 22 years old, nine times in the head and torso with a .40 caliber handgun.

Several in the crowd were struck by stray bullets during the melee. One of the victims was a 14-year-old girl, a ninth grade high school student who later testified at the shooter's trial. She had arrived at the mall with her grandfather and a friend from school, and was waiting in the food court to meet up with her brother.

A mother, who was in the food court as well with her 7-year-old child, was struck and rushed to the hospital for, thankfully, life-saving medical care.

After the shooting, the perpetrator fled the scene and Puerto Rico. In July, he was extradited from the state of New York where he had fled, was tried and convicted and is now serving a 199 year sentence for first-degree murder.

What stands out starkly is the callous audacity of this crime – committed at a crowded mall with dozens of witnesses, with the play-by-play caught on security cameras, and absolutely no thought given to the innocent.

Unfortunately, this is but one example of the blatant and unbridled drug related violence that is happening on U.S. soil right now and threatening the lives of over 4 million U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The U.S. Caribbean territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are America's Caribbean Border. Because of their geographic proximity to drug producing and drug transiting countries in South America and the Caribbean, notably Colombia, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, the U.S. Caribbean Border is increasingly being used as a transshipment zone, primarily for cocaine but also heroin, destined for mainland U.S. markets.

As a U.S. territory, once these drugs enter Puerto Rico, they are easily delivered to the states, through commercial airlines and container ships, without having to clear Customs or other heightened scrutiny.

An estimated 70 to 80 percent of the Colombian cocaine reaching Puerto Rico is then transshipped to U.S. cities across the eastern seaboard, from Florida to New York, according to local and federal law enforcement authorities.

Puerto Rico is in turn a destination for illicit drug money and illegal firearms coming from the U.S. mainland to fortify drug trafficking networks. The latest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area analysis reports that Puerto Rico has also become a money laundering destination for large drug trafficking organizations that place illegal proceeds into bank accounts in Puerto Rico and then funnel the money—via wire transfers—to accounts in Asia, Europe, and even the Middle East.

And recent ATF data confirms that illegal firearms used to commit crimes in Puerto Rico can be traced back to more than 20 states - with Florida, Texas, Georgia and Ohio being the biggest source states for 2011.

The transnational criminal organizations operating through Puerto Rico and the states pose an ever changing threat and are quick to adapt in our global economy. The reality is that federal and state law enforcement have not been able to keep pace with this agile and well-funded enemy. As a result, the U.S. Caribbean Border is experiencing a dramatic upsurge in drug related crime and violence.

While the U.S. homicide rate has declined substantially in recent decades, Puerto Rico is experiencing an extraordinary uptick in drug related violence. In 2011, Puerto Rico had the highest number of murders in a single year in all of its history, with 1,136 murders for a population of approximately 3.7 million people. State law enforcement officials estimate that close to 80 percent of murders in Puerto Rico are related to the illegal drug trade.

This has driven Puerto Rico's murder rate to six times the national average and more than twice as high as any state. To put our figures in context, the Southwest border state of Texas with 25 million residents had 1,246 homicides in 2010.

One of the factors escalating drug-related murders is the excess supply of cocaine that stays on the island in the transshipment process. This product is often received by local traffickers as in-kind payments for their role in the drug supply chain leading to lucrative stateside markets. This form of payment has acted as a catalyst for brutal competition to control local distribution markets.

As anyone who understands basic economics can tell you, once the Puerto Rico market reaches saturation, local distributors can either drop their prices to generate greater demand from their existing consumer base, or they can eliminate their competition and steal away their customers. Judging from the levels of trafficker on trafficker violence, these criminals are routinely using intimidation and violence to gain and retain control of local retail drug markets.

What is also alarming is the recent increase in the ruthlessness of these violent crimes and the rising incidents of innocent bystanders being caught in the crossfire. A horrific example of this is the well-known "Tombola Massacre," which occurred in October 2009. Members of a drug ring used rifles and automatic weapons to attack a rival trafficker at a nightclub in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico, leaving eight bystanders dead and more than 20 wounded.

These tragedies have not adversely affected Puerto Rico tourism, partially attributed to our state police dispatching additional officers to protect high tourism areas. But this situation has greatly tested our resolve. The Government of Puerto Rico is doing everything within our limited jurisdiction and resources. But we cannot fight this war alone, nor should we be required to do so.

This is a shared responsibility. The consequences affect us all. Nearly 30 percent of the illegal drugs coming into the continental United States come through the Caribbean, making us as important a border from a defensive standpoint as the U.S.-Mexico border.

While a strong contingent of federal law enforcement resources have justifiably gone to the U.S.-Mexico border, defenses along the U.S. Caribbean Border have remained under-resourced. And

highlighting the interconnected nature of this national security challenge, the pressure brought to bear along the U.S.-Mexico border has resulted in traffickers increasingly using routes through the Caribbean.

Members of this committee are correct to be concerned about stopping drug trafficking in the Caribbean basin, as up to 80 percent of the cocaine coming through Puerto Rico reaches cities across the Eastern seaboard.

This is truly a *national security issue*. The federal government must take responsibility for guaranteeing the safety and security of America's Caribbean Border, the more than 4 million U.S. citizens who live there, and the stateside communities impacted by the flow of drugs and the inevitable violence.

### **Government of Puerto Rico's Efforts**

Puerto Rico is facing many challenges, and we are showing real and genuine accountability to confront those challenges. As governor, I refuse to shy away from making tough decisions that ultimately affect the safety and quality of life of my constituents. But I firmly believe the federal government must make an equally strong commitment. As a U.S. territory, we receive disproportionately less federal funding for law enforcement efforts when compared to states with similar populations and fewer responsibilities affecting national security.

Similar to the fiscal challenges we face at the federal level, Puerto Rico has faced significant deficit and budget challenges. I have made it clear to my entire team that everyone is expected to create a more efficient, effective and accountable government. And we have made great advances toward putting Puerto Rico on the right path. But when we dedicate all of the state level resources to law enforcement, a sacrifice that we continue to make alone, it places too much of a burden on my constituents.

Since I took office in 2009, I have been working not only to address this very serious drug trafficking problem and the violence against our citizens that it spawns, but also to bring about positive change in our state police and criminal justice system that have traditionally faced significant challenges due to years of underfunding, inefficiencies, lack of sufficient oversight and administrative neglect.

### **Puerto Rico Police**

The Government of Puerto Rico is implementing a comprehensive effort to improve the professionalization of the Puerto Rico Police, one of the nation's largest police forces with approximately 17,000 officers. We are addressing the issue through multiple fronts, including training partnerships and enhancements for the local police force including purchasing new equipment, improving precinct conditions and increasing officer salaries, as well as improving access to modern communications and technology.

The reform process is focused on changing and improving the policies and practices of the Puerto Rico Police in all aspects of the organization's culture, operations, structure,

investigations, education and services. The goal is to make the Puerto Rico Police a model for constitutional policing, and steady progress has been made and will continue toward that objective.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division investigation into the Puerto Rico Police, which began before I took office, revealed brewing issues with our law enforcement. My predecessor regrettably ignored these violations, and it has taken time to make the improvements that I expect. But we have taken swift and decisive action to reform the state police. Without excuses or delays, we have assumed responsibility and initiated a full-fledged reform effort to not only help officers do their jobs better and within the framework of constitutional policing, but to restore public confidence and trust in the Police and the state justice system.

Toward this end, we established an independent monitor for the Puerto Rico Police that evaluated the policies, procedures and practices of the department; we've created a Reform and Compliance Committee; and we established a new use-of-force policy and have trained over 14,000 officers in that policy. We have worked to improve and expand officer training at our Police Academy for both new recruits and veteran officers, and we've improved officer supervision, instituting a performance and testing based promotion system.

I appointed Hector Pesquera, who is here with me today, as the new Superintendent of the Puerto Rico Police. Superintendent Pesquera is uniquely qualified to lead the reform efforts. He began his successful 27-year career with the FBI as an agent in Puerto Rico and has come back to Puerto Rico to help combat crime and strengthen collaboration between the police, local communities, and the federal government.

To help empower our citizens, we partnered with a local non-profit called, "Basta Ya," which means "Enough is Enough." "Basta Ya," was founded by Luis and Marie Rodriguez Romero, who lost their son just over a year ago because of a violent crime. This family has led by the powerful example of turning their personal tragedy into a community effort to help the police fight violent crime.

"Basta Ya" developed a service for people to anonymously file police reports, using online resources and mobile applications. This collaboration with individual communities has helped our police gather valuable intelligence in locating the scene of a crime and apprehending criminals.

My administration has expended considerable resources to reform and strengthen the Police by bringing in a multi-disciplinary team of experts in law enforcement and proper policing practices. This team has been working for the past two years to provide improved protocols and training to benefit both the police and the communities they serve. We are making real progress in terms of improving our police department, which we believe is a moral imperative to which my Administration is fully committed.

But keep in mind that the Puerto Rico Police is operating at a significant disadvantage when compared to many stateside police departments. For example, the total annual budget of the Puerto Rico Police, 17,000 officers serving 3.7 million constituents, is approximately \$800

million. In comparison, the Broward County Sheriff's Office in Florida, with 3,000 officers serving 1.7 million constituents, has an annual budget of approximately \$700 million.

### **Specific Efforts on Drug Trafficking and Border Protection**

To directly attack the drug problem and assist in protecting our borders, my administration has established several significant state level initiatives. The first initiative is called the "Strike the Drugpoint" (Golpe al Punto), which is a joint operation led by the Puerto Rico Police in conjunction with 33 prosecutors from the Puerto Rico Department of Justice's Organized Crime Unit. This "state strike force" has dismantled 741 drug retail points throughout Puerto Rico, obtaining very high conviction rates.

To help rehabilitate those addicts who are identified during these operations, we formed another strike force, called "Helping the User."

We have also gone after the drug trafficking networks supply chain. Our "Strike the Supplier" force allows state law enforcement officials to actively investigate and reduce the amount of drugs and weapons entering our harbors and airports. Our "Group of 100" initiative is comprised of officers with specialized knowledge and equipment related to narcotics, highway patrols, vehicle theft and tactical operations. The multidisciplinary units work collaboratively to identify, investigate, disrupt and dismantle drug retail points.

We also instituted a cargo container scanning and inspection program to identify contraband, drugs and weapons entering our territory illegally through our maritime ports. Inbound domestic cargo containers are scanned with rapid x-ray technology in dedicated truck lanes before they leave the port and enter the "stream of commerce" on our streets.

After much effort, we recently reached an agreement with U.S. Customs and Border Protection that will allow us to expand our port security program to include scanning of inbound international cargo. This effort is essential, given that a significant amount of Puerto Rico's interstate and international commerce takes place using maritime transportation.

After just one year of implementing our program, we are now scanning more than 90 percent of inbound cargo containers arriving at the Port of San Juan, the Island's largest shipping port, with a goal of scanning up to 100 percent of inbound cargo by later this summer.

### **Treatment and Prevention Efforts**

While these border security measures have been essential, I realize that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. That's why my administration is also implementing treatment and prevention services to reduce the threats that these dangerous drugs pose on our people. My administration has partnered with many non-profits to treat as many drug abusers and addicts as possible.

On the prevention side, we have implemented a CeaseFire pilot program in Puerto Rico called Acuerdos de Paz. The CeaseFire model, which has been used successfully in major metropolitan

areas such as Chicago, has been successfully adapted to help treat drug addicts and criminals. CeaseFire creates a Neighborhood-by-Neighborhood strategy to end the cycle of violence and restore peace. Community leaders and local citizens learn how to partner with our public safety leaders and become first-responders. We always know what's happening in our neighborhoods – now we can actually do something about it. It's the first step toward taking back our streets.

As an Island, we need to be more effective as first-responders within our communities. We must prevent violent acts from occurring. We must identify the people who are most vulnerable. In many disadvantaged areas of Puerto Rico, no different than in many of your districts, gangs are brainwashing our children, leading them down a deadly path. We have a responsibility to rescue our children from the deadly influence of gang violence. We need to give our children the positive influences they need to become responsible citizens. CeaseFire is not only teaching responsibility, it is saving lives.

We also launched a youth-focused initiative called Value Your Life (Valora Tu Vida), led by the Puerto Rico Department of Justice and providing at-risk youth with workshops and facilitated dialogues with both reformed convicts and victims of crime. The goal is to strengthen these young people's value of both their own lives and the lives of others, and increase their commitment to ethical behavior.

We have also worked with the renowned Josephson Institute of Ethics to adapt and implement the Character Counts program throughout our public schools. It's an opportunity to underscore the values we want to pass on to our children, and it is seamlessly integrated into school curriculums and learning environments. We have already seen a noticeable reduction in bullying, fighting and dropouts, as well as an improvement in academic performance. That is real progress. That is something that every Puerto Rican family should be proud of. After all, we're in this together.

### **Local Efforts Making a Difference**

Through the collaboration of government as well as community and faith-based organizations, we implemented the most successful weapons amnesty program in Puerto Rico's history. In a period of just 90 days, 1,966 illegal firearms and 100,129 rounds of ammunition were taken off our streets.

With entire communities working together, we proved that you can get weapons off the streets and out of the hands of those considering a life of crime. I am proud of their decision. And for those who did not surrender their weapons, we will not allow them to threaten our quality of life. Our police officers are working closely with every community, so that we can all take responsibility in protecting our neighborhoods.

Puerto Ricans will continue to show strength on public safety during a referendum this August. We hope to amend our territorial Constitution to limit suspected criminals from being released on bail. This provision would apply to all suspects accused of committing premeditated murder, as well as murder that involves stalking, home robbery, kidnapping, sexual assault, firing a weapon in public or from a moving vehicle, and when the victim is an officer on duty. Passing

this amendment will address the Achilles heel of Puerto Rico's criminal justice system, which for decades has allowed violent criminals who have been arrested on murder charges to walk right back out onto the streets and kill more innocent civilians, including potential witnesses. This situation is simply unacceptable. And I plan to do everything I can to support this referendum, in order to better protect Puerto Rican families.

### **Collaboration with Federal Authorities**

Since coming into office, my administration has worked hard to re-establish and improve relationships between state and federal law enforcement agencies. I have personally hosted regular meetings to bring together federal and state law enforcement leadership on the Island, and we have the success stories to prove that this partnership can work.

The first big breakthrough was in February 2010 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. District Attorney's Office, the Puerto Rico Department of Justice and the Puerto Rico Police on the referral and handling of cases involving concurrent state and federal jurisdiction. This MOU laid the foundation for the investigative and prosecutorial responsibilities in a range of drug trafficking and violent crime cases.

Puerto Rico has also detailed over 260 state police officers to work directly in federal law enforcement agencies through joint Task Forces, with officers detailed to the FBI, DEA, ATF, ICE, CBP-Air and Marine, TSA, U.S. Marshalls, U.S. Postal Inspector, IRS and other federal agencies.

We also worked with federal authorities to create an "Illegal Firearms and Violent Crime Strike Force" that operates in five of the Island's 13 police regions. As of this May, the strike force has already yielded 336 arrests of which 314 suspects were being detained without bail. This is in large part responsible for the over 20% reduction in murders this year over last for the zones covered by the agreement.

The proof of the success of these joint federal/state task forces is in the statistics. In 2011 alone, the task forces arrested over 1,800 individuals of whom more than 170 were illegal immigrants. They also seized close to \$95 million in illegal drugs, over 800 illegal firearms and 5,000 rounds of ammunition, and over \$27 million in vehicles, boats, airplanes and real estate being used by criminal networks.

Other joint operations include the Puerto Rico National Guard's (PRNG) Counterdrug Program, which is funded by the Department of Defense through the National Guard Counter-Drug Program. The PRNG dedicates approximately 76 guardsmen to the program from its Army and Air units. These soldiers and airmen work to operate the fixed radar system and receive data feeds from the mobile radars and the Radar Over the Horizon (ROTHR).

The PRNG has also provided support to U.S. Counterdrug efforts in the Dominican Republic and Honduras, nations that are part of the U.S.-sponsored Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), through which the federal government has provided over \$360 million and \$139 million respectively in foreign assistance.



Our PRNG forces are more than willing to do their part to support national security efforts in other states and abroad. But given the level of drug related crime in our own territory, it is difficult to understand why the federal government leadership would not ensure their agencies on the Island have the needed resources.

### **Challenges Facing Federal Authorities in PR**

We have collaborated successfully with federal law enforcement officials in Puerto Rico. They have performed exceptionally under very challenging circumstances. They are often doing their work with fewer resources, less manpower, less funding and less strategic support from federal law enforcement officials in Washington than their counterparts in other U.S. jurisdictions. While I applaud their perseverance, they lack the appropriate resources to overcome the homeland security threats that pervade this nation, including in our U.S. territories. That's the primary role of the federal government. Yet, it is clear that over 4 million U.S. citizens in the Caribbean territories are being left under protected.

We have observed that there is a clear mismatch between the level of drug-related violence occurring along the U.S. Caribbean Border and the size and scope of the federal response. When American lives are in danger, we have a moral obligation to protect them wherever they may be. I know that you share my belief. And I need your commitment to act on this principle. Unfortunately, the limited attention and leadership from Washington's federal law enforcement agencies suggests that Puerto Rico and USVI are lower priorities.

We're not just talking about the value of life. We're talking about American lives. Puerto Ricans have fought and died for this country in many wars. We take that honor seriously. And we expect the same principle that compels us to fight for this nation will also persuade federal law enforcement officials to aid their fellow Americans in Puerto Rico.

This lack of sufficient attention is most blatantly evidenced by the absence of any kind of comprehensive interagency strategy by the federal government to counteract the drug violence and national security threats these criminal networks generate along the U.S. Caribbean Border. Threats that range from laundering illicit drug proceeds to trafficking of illegal weapons. Threats that involve other criminal enterprises such as human trafficking, prostitution, identity fraud and financial crimes. All these crimes chip away at our nation's security and undermine the safety of our citizens.

Even worse, we know some of the drug trafficking organizations operating through Puerto Rico have had ties to narco-guerilla organizations, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (or FARC), which has been known to demand payments from trafficker networks in exchange for help transporting drugs from Colombia to Venezuela on their way to Puerto Rico and then the states. These are the same narco-guerillas that the federal government has sought to defeat by investing close to \$8 billion in foreign assistance through Plan Colombia, a decade-long effort to help the Colombian government in its fight against drug producers and traffickers.

In a recent example, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) dismantled a well-oiled distribution chain that between 2006 and 2011 moved close to 4,000 kilos of cocaine from

Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Tortola, Antigua and the British Virgin Islands to Puerto Rico using planes and luxury cruisers. As part of their operation, this network had an agreement with the 10th division of the Colombian leftists guerrilla group FARC where the narco-guerrillas received \$1,000 for every kilo of cocaine that was transported to the Valle de Apure in Venezuela.

Once the cocaine was on Venezuelan soil, the group would ship it via airplane to waters close to Tortola and Antigua, where the drugs were dropped and picked up by luxury ships bound for Puerto Rico. According to the charges, some cocaine remained in Puerto Rico while the majority was sent to Miami and New York.

As William F. Wechsler, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, affirmed in a recent irregular warfare summit sponsored by the Institute for Defense and Government Advancement, the convergence of crime, terrorism and insurgency and its threat to U.S. national security is a growing concern for the Defense Department.

In 2011, President Barack Obama issued a Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime declaring these organizations a national security threat. The strategy also noted the complex and in some places opaque relationships developed among criminal organizations, terrorist groups and insurgent movements, which points to the likelihood that more terrorist organizations are using criminal mechanisms to support themselves and more criminal organizations are using the tactics of terrorist organizations. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently testified, “terrorists and insurgents will increasingly turn to crime and criminal networks for funding and logistics, in part because of U.S. and western success in attacking other sources of their funding.”

We cannot allow this threat to take hold along the U.S. Caribbean Border where drug trafficking networks already have a clearly established supply chain to the states. Because God Forbid, this established network could be bought for the right price and used to bring in terrorists that can harm or kill American citizens. We must act with greater urgency.

Up to now, the federal government’s domestic efforts have focused on securing the Southwest and Northern Border by surging manpower, technology and resources. This is completely necessary given the U.S.-Mexico border serves as a primary point of entry for illegal drugs and immigrants into the U.S., and the Northern Border is one of the longest continuous borders in the world. These domestic efforts have been complemented by U.S. foreign policy initiatives with the investment of billions of dollars in foreign assistance to Mexico, Central America and Caribbean nations, through the Merida Initiative, the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the Caribbean Border Security Initiative (CBSI). More than \$1.6 billion has been appropriated for the Merida Initiative alone. However, as these efforts yield results, making it harder and costlier for drug trafficking organizations to use the Southwest border, this inevitably pushes traffic back to other points of entry, including the well-known Caribbean drug transshipment routes that were so prominent in the 1980s.

The unintended consequence of these U.S. domestic and foreign policies is that, in the absence of any significant federal law enforcement surge along the U.S. Caribbean Border, there has been

an increase in the vulnerability of both territories to the pressures of the drug trade and transnational criminal organizations.

The impact that those drugs are having on the levels of violence in Puerto Rico and USVI are disproportionately high even when compared to the Southwest border states. That violence is impacting U.S. citizens in our territories who deserve the same protection from the federal government as their family members who live in Texas, California, New York, Florida or any other state of the Union.

Yet Puerto Rico and the USVI are barely mentioned in the annual National Drug Control Strategy produced by the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). To make matters worse, when we were included in this year's strategy, it was one passing mention in a section on the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), a foreign assistance program which Puerto Rico, as a U.S. jurisdiction, is not even eligible to participate.

Further, Puerto Rico and USVI are not included in a variety of critical federal data sources on drug use and crime, most notably the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. This is a critical oversight, given this data is used to develop the National Drug Control Strategy, and to measure the effectiveness of drug control programs. So why was Puerto Rico excluded from over 50% of the surveys, studies, data sets, reports and programs included in the 2011 National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement? The exclusion contradicts federal reports that performance statistics on the Island were outstanding.

It appears that federal officials in Washington are selectively including us when it benefits them while excluding us when it tarnishes any national statistics.

But let us not fool ourselves. By excluding Puerto Rico and the USVI from these national statistics, the National Drug Control Strategy, and other plans, the federal government does a disservice to the U.S. citizens they have sworn to serve and protect. They deny us vital federal resources, making it convenient for policymakers to ignore the deeper challenges we face.

It's also become clear that federal law enforcement agencies in Puerto Rico lack sufficient aircraft and maritime units. The Coast Guard currently does not have any fixed-wing coastal patrol airplanes permanently stationed in Puerto Rico. Although fixed-wing aircraft stationed in neighboring regions are used for interdiction missions in Puerto Rico, these aircraft cannot respond quickly to incidents in Puerto Rico.

One of the significant challenges we face is vacancies in key federal law enforcement agencies on the Island. The number of authorized positions is too low, and the number of vacancies at those agencies is too high. According to information provided by the agencies themselves, ATF has a vacancy rate of 39%, DEA has a vacancy rate of 12%, and ICE has a vacancy rate of 15%. And we have been advised that due to lack of personnel, an insufficient number of CBP agents are available to patrol the eastern coast of the Island, which has been a growing target for traffickers.

These are just some examples of what appears to be a pattern of neglect by top level federal authorities.

### **What can Federal Authorities Do to Secure the U.S. Caribbean Border**

The Government of Puerto Rico is doing everything it can to increase public safety but this is a national security issue that must be confronted.

We simply cannot do it alone. Unless Washington acts, these criminal organizations will only strengthen their foothold in the region.

I have repeatedly called on the President and senior federal law enforcement officials to establish a U.S. Caribbean Border Initiative to be led by the White House and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. All I am seeking from the federal government is the same level of commitment that has been provided to combat the drug trade along the Southwest and Northern borders.

We must bolster resources, funding and staffing of federal law enforcement agencies throughout Puerto Rico that remain under-staffed and under-funded compared to their stateside counterparts.

We must fill federal agency vacancies.

We must ensure the Customs and Border Protection has the resources to carry out cargo container scanning at Puerto Rico's ports and to patrol our borders.

We must provide on-the-ground assistance to train Puerto Rico Police to deal with the security challenges created by transnational criminal organizations operating in the region.

We must ensure Puerto Rico is included in national border security and drug trafficking strategies.

Right now, Puerto Rico is serving on the front lines. We need help fighting this battle along the Caribbean border, to protect the U.S. citizens there being buffeted by violence and to prevent the fight from spreading further onto the streets of the U.S. mainland.

We cannot win without the active involvement of the federal government to secure all of our nation's borders. Our constituents deserve and expect no less.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the committee for having me here today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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